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SUBJECT: READOUT ON JORDANIAN MINISTERS' SEPT. 10 VISIT TO BAGHDAD

REF: AMMAN 6689

Classified By: CDA David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (U) In the first visit of a senior Arab state official to Iraq since the fall of Saddam, Jordanian PM Adnan Badran, accompanied by four other cabinet members, met in Baghdad September 10 with Iraqi Vice President Adel Abdul Mehdi and Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari.

12. (C) Jordanian Foreign Minister Farouq Kasrawi, who accompanied the PM, gave Charge a readout September 11. Kasrawi called the visit "very positive." He said PM Jaafari told the Jordanian visitors of his desire to further strengthen relations. Jaafari referred to Jordan as "Iraq's lung," and was pleased that PM Badran had been the first Arab leader to visit; it had "cleared the air" in the complex bilateral relationship.

13. (C) Characterizing the meetings as positive overall, Kasrawi said the Iraqis had raised a few "irritants" in the Jordan-Iraq relationship. Delays at the border clearing truck traffic were a problem, for example. (Comment: We estimate at least 40 percent of Iraq's imports come through the Iraqi-Jordanian border crossing point at Karama/Trebil. End Comment.) The Jordanians replied by describing Jordanian efforts to tighten security, while trying to expedite traffic. Jaafari also mentioned the King's late 2004 "Shia crescent" remark, but did not dwell on it. Jaafari expressed concern about what he called "negative comments" about the ITG in Jordanian mosques and in the Jordanian press. Badran reportedly replied "you should hear what they say about me."

14. (C) Kasrawi said Jaafari wanted to revitalize the Jordan-Iraq joint ministerial committee, and wanted to come himself to Amman to reciprocate the visit and chair the next meeting. In sum, Kasrawi said the visit was "an ice breaker, long overdue, but there will be more."

15. (C) Kasrawi asked Charge to convey his sincere thanks for all the logistical and security help that Embassy Baghdad and the U.S. military provided for this visit.

16. (C) Prime Minister Badran's spokesman Ali Al Ayed, who accompanied the delegation, gave Polcouns a similar readout. He commented that Jaafari "at first frankly expressed some bitterness" over what he described as the Arab states' "boycott" of the ITG. Jaafari reportedly asked how Jordanian media could describe insurgents as "martyrs"; "isn't an Iraqi child a martyr too?" In reply to Polcouns' query, Al Ayed said the Iraqis did not express dissatisfaction with Jordanian efforts to intercept would-be jihadists trying to make their way to Iraq. Al Ayed said the atmosphere soon improved markedly, that Badran had assured Jaafari that the Jordanian media did not represent the GOJ view, and that he expected to see further ministerial-level meetings soon within the framework of the Joint Committee. These will include discussions between finance ministers of the balance remaining from the old Jordan-Iraq trade protocol, a meeting between interior ministers on border security, and discussions between planning ministers on proposals to improve the transport and border infrastructure between Aqaba and Baghdad.

Islamic Action Front Blasts Visit

17. (C) Jordan's Islamic Action Front (IAF) was quoted in international media as criticizing Badran for supporting "a fraudulent Iraqi government," a condemnation we suspect will resonate with ordinary Jordanians, who polls show continue to oppose the U.S. presence in Iraq by large majorities.

18. (C) Comment: This visit, which was prominently covered by the local media, came at the King's direction. With Jordan's strategic interests entwined

with our own in Iraq, Jordanian officials will continue to look for ways to help the political process there and to reach beyond the Sunni Muslim community. They recognize that, because of the heavy historical baggage encumbering the bilateral relationship, Jordan will have to continue to create opportunities to demonstrate readiness to help the new leadership and new currents in Iraq. End Comment.
HALE